

Bones, bullets provide indication of Civil War battle

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Bones, buttons and bullets uncovered at recently discovered graves near the Antietam battlefield in Western Maryland are providing new details about a pivotal Civil War battle that included the bloodiest day in American military history.

Researchers for the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. National Park Service say the graves are of four members of the famed Irish Brigade from New York.

The four died Sept. 17, 1862, as wave after wave of Irish Brigade soldiers smashed against the Confederate line and were cut down by rifle fire on a day that saw 24,000 soldiers, Union and Confederate, fall in battle.

Examination of a shoulder blade and teeth found in one of the sites shows that a 45-year-old man helped lead the Union charge.

"This gentleman was in the front rank as the Irish brigade tried to dislodge the Confeder-

ate troops on that day," said Stephen Potter, an archaeologist for the U.S. National Park Service.

Potter said discovery of "buck and ball" ammunition indicates that the Irish Brigade was not well-armed for the battle it met that day.

The Irishmen, he said, were carrying smooth-bore long guns loaded to fire a marble-sized ball and two buckshot pellets.

"These were, in effect, combat shotguns," he said, that

killed best at close range.

Based on the Confederate slugs that killed the 45-year-old New Yorker, said Potter, the rebels were using rifled long guns that were lethal from long distances. As a result, he said, the Confederates were able to kill the Union troops at 200 yards, long before the Yankees could charge to within the effective range of their weapons.

The burial sites were found in April by three amateur archaeologists searching a field

near the boundaries of the federally owned battleground near Hagerstown, Md. A team from the Smithsonian and the Park Service excavated the site and sifted tons of clay soil to find artifacts.

Dennis F. Frye, Park Service historian, said the Battle of Antietam, named after the creek which flows through the grounds, is considered by

many to be pivotal in the Civil War. Though it ended in a draw, Frye said the battle halted the South's first invasion of the North.